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C O N F I D E N T I A L CHIANG MAI 000182

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [SCUL](#) [SNAR](#) [PGOV](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: HALL OF OPIUM SERVES AS EDUCATIONAL, TOURIST, RESEARCH CENTER IN GOLDEN TRIANGLE

CLASSIFIED BY: Bea Camp, Consul General, Chiang Mai, Dept of State.

REASON: 1.4 (d)

[11](#). (u) Summary. Two years after greeting its first visitors, Thailand's Hall of Opium opened officially July 6 in a formal ceremony presided over by Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn. The 60,000 square-foot museum, beautifully situated in the rural hills of the infamous Golden Triangle, averages 70,000 visitors per year. End summary

[12](#). (u) The \$10 million Hall of Opium museum, located in Chiang Saen where Thailand, Burma and Laos meet along the Mekong River, is a sprawling

[13](#). (u) The museum is under the direction of the Doi Tung Development Project of the Mae Fah Luang Foundation, established in 1988 by the Prince of Thailand. The museum's stated aim is to educate the public on the effects narcotics pose to the national economy and society as well as to the people's physical and mental well being. During the first year of operations over half of all visitors were students brought from Chiang Rai and Phrae on special programs. During the second year about

[14](#). (sbu) The Mae Fah Luang Foundation delayed the official ceremony for two years in the hope that the King would himself grace the opening in honor of his late mother. According to Foundation Director MR (Mom Ratchawong) Disnadda Disikul, the King's health prevented his attendance. The royal interest was spelled out in the

[15](#). (c) The Crown Prince conducted the religious opening ceremony on July 6 with dutiful stiffness, followed by a 15-minute foray into the field of involvement by Japan, China

[16](#). (sbu) Funding for initial construction of the massive museum, built into a hillside, was provided by the Japanese Overseas Economic Cooperation of Thailand. China's Ministry of Culture provided significant assistance as well, ensuring a Chinese perspective on the historical period during which "the most powerful military and economic powers forced involvement from the beginning. The U.S. is represented most visibly by a large reproduction of the DEA seal and selections from old documentaries that discuss CIA involvement in the drug trade of Southeast

[17](#). (u) Future plans include an exhibit highlighting the King's work on opium substitution and a cooperative exhibition with the Bangkok region

[18](#). (sbu) Comment: In light of the museum's ambitious aim to become an educational center for youth as well as a research center for Southeast Asia is disappointing. The relative remoteness of the museum makes it inaccessible for most tourists while the attempt to be both entertaining and educational leaves visitors with no clear exit message. Nevertheless